



# Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

Volume 11, Issue 8

## The Healthy Journey

handls.nih.gov  
877-677-9538

U.S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

### Mental Health Support During COVID-19

This time of year, the days grow colder and shorter. During late Fall and Winter, many people experience the “winter blues,” or Seasonal Affective Disorder. Symptoms of SAD include feeling down, fatigue, trouble concentrating, sleep problems, appetite changes, and a loss of interest in activities that are normally enjoyable. COVID-19 has been a challenging time for many people, causing feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness.

Many experts believe that COVID-19 could worsen mental health symptoms for many people this Winter. During the pandemic, social distancing has caused many people to feel isolated. Statewide and national restrictions on social gatherings have made it difficult to socialize with loved ones. In 2020, many people have felt uncertainty and worry in response to many current events in our country. To top it off, many people have faced stressors such as job loss, financial strain, and food insecurity during the pandemic.

#### Mental Health First Aid Kit

There are many ways to cope with stress. Some coping tools are healthy, such as exercise and relaxation techniques. Other coping tools can cause harm, such as over- or under-eating, drugs, and alcohol.

People feel more prepared to deal with stress when they have a coping plan. Many people have a first aid kit on-hand at home to help with physical ailments. Creating a *Mental Health First Aid Kit* can help you keep coping tools on-hand for whenever you need a mood booster. Here are some suggestions for coping tools to put in your *Mental Health First Aid Kit*.

**Lean on your support network.** In the age of social distancing, it has been hard to gather with friends and family. However, there are still many ways to stay connected during COVID-19. Some examples are calling, texting, video chatting, emailing, or mailing letters your loved ones.

**Try to get quality sleep.** It is hard to fall asleep when you are distressed. Try to improve your sleep quality in small ways. Try to build a sleep routine by laying down at the same time each night. Limit the use of electronics before bedtime. Avoid caffeine late in the day. Improving your sleep quality can help you manage stress during the day.

### 5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain

1. ASK
2. KEEP THEM SAFE
3. BE THERE
4. HELP THEM CONNECT
5. STAY CONNECTED

**Move your body.** Staying active is a healthy distraction from difficult emotions. Exercising also releases endorphins, the “feel good” chemicals in the brain that help boost your mood. Gentle exercise such as walking or stretching can be an excellent way to release stress and anxiety.

**Practice mindfulness.** Activities such as journaling, drawing, repeating a mantra, prayer, and meditation are mindfulness techniques. These activities have a calming effect on the body and mind. Visit the following website to access free guided meditations from the

### Contents

Mental Health Support During COVID-19.....	1
Medication information.....	3
Closing thoughts.....	3

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>.

**Let in the light.** Exposure to sunlight for 20-30 minutes a day (when possible) can boost your body's levels of Vitamin D. This vitamin eases depressive symptoms associated with SAD. If you are deficient in Vitamin D, you may want to consult with your doctor. If it isn't possible to get outside, open the curtains to let light into your room.

**Be gentle with yourself.** When you are already feeling blue, it can be very overwhelming to start a self-care practice. Instead of making many big changes, try to find one small success in your day. What is one thing you can do to be kind to yourself today? Preparing one healthy snack is a success. Stretching for 10 minutes is a success. Congratulate yourself on the small things, rather than pressuring yourself to make major changes.



**Start the new year with a SMART goal.** Is there a goal you'd like to achieve in the New Year? Use the SMART Goals strategy to make progress. A SMART goal is Specific, Measurable; Achievable, Realistic, and Time Bound. The more specific you are when you outline your goal, the more likely you are to achieve it. Setting a deadline for your goal can keep you on track.

**Find local or national professional support.** Keep reading this issue of The Healthy Journey to find out more about free local and national resources for support during challenging times.

### Baltimore Community Health Resources

**COVID-19 Testing in Maryland.** There are hundreds of COVID-19 testing sites in Maryland. The following website will list testing sites in your area once you type in your address: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/symptoms-testing>.

**COVID-19 Testing in Baltimore City.** Please use the following webpage to find an updated list of COVID-19

testing sites in Baltimore City: <http://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/testing>. Neighborhood mobile testing sites change weekly to help residents throughout the city. If you do not have health insurance, please call 211 for updated information on where you can get a test.

**Coronavirus text alerts.** Text *MdReady* to 898211 to get alerts and resources regarding COVID-19.

**Baltimore COVID-19 Emergency Food Strategy.** Baltimore City and its partners are providing free grab-n-go meals for youth and families. Baltimore City is also distributing grocery boxes and produce boxes. Please use the following website to find a distribution site near you: <https://www.bmorechildren.com/freemeals>.

**Maryland Access Point (MAP).** If you are over the age of 60 and need help with grocery or meal delivery, contact MAP at 410-396-CARE (2273).

### Find National Mental Health Support

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.** <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); En Español 1-888-628-9454. The Lifeline is a free, confidential crisis hotline that is available to everyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Crisis Text Line.** <https://www.crisistextline.org/>. Text HELLO to 741741. The Crisis Text hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the U.S. The Crisis Text Line connects people to a crisis counselor who can provide support.

**Veterans Crisis Line.** <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1, text 838255, or chat online. The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for veterans, service members, and their families.

**SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline.** <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has created a Disaster Distress Helpline that provides free, multilingual, 24/7 crisis counseling to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.

**SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline.** <https://find-treatment.samhsa.gov/>. Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357). The Treatment Referral Helpline, as well as Behavioral

Health Treatment Locator, provide general information on where to locate treatment services in your area.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline.** <https://www.thehotline.org/>. Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or chat online. Home is not a safe place for everyone. If you or someone you care about is a victim of abuse, the National Domestic Violence Hotline offers free, confidential, multilingual, 24/7 support.

### Find Local Mental Health Support

**Emergency services.** Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you or someone you know is in immediate danger or having a mental health crisis.

**Maryland's Helpline.** <https://211md.org/211provider-md-mental-health>. Call 1-800-422-0009 or 211 (press 1). Formerly known as Maryland Crisis Hotline, Maryland's Helpline offers free 24/7 crisis support to Maryland residents.

**Baltimore Neighbors Network.** <https://www.baltimoreneighborsnetwork.org/>. Call 410-324-2917. The Baltimore Neighbors Network is an initiative of Healing City Baltimore. Trained volunteers call Baltimore residents to offer support and comfort. Volunteers can connect you with mental health ambassadors and pro bono clinicians if you need additional support. Contact this network if you need help, or if you are looking for a way to give back to your community by volunteering over the phone.

**Pro Bono Counseling Project.** <https://probonocounseling.org/>. Call 410-825-1001. The Pro Bono Counseling Project provides free access to ongoing psychotherapy for Marylanders with limited resources. Therapists through the Pro Bono Counseling Project are volunteer licensed mental health professionals. During COVID-19, teletherapy (video conferencing) and telephone services are being provided.

**Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD).** <https://www.mhamd.org/>. Call 443-901-1550, 443-470-9426, or email [info@mhamd.org](mailto:info@mhamd.org). MHAMD's Connections Project for Seniors provides phone and digital peer support to Baltimore County residents feeling isolated during COVID-19. Call the Program Manager or complete the online referral form to begin receiving supportive calls. Visit <https://www.mhamd.org/what-we-do/outreach-and-education/peers-connections-project/> for more information about the Connections Project. Check out MHAMD's website to

access a free resource library with information on behavioral health for all life stages.

HANDLS Referral Services. Call 443-431-0909 or email [handls@mail.nih.gov](mailto:handls@mail.nih.gov). For brief symptom management and referral services for care in your area, please contact HANDLS Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Allison, Monday - Friday from 9am-12pm.

### Medication information

Many adults use prescription medication to treat physical and mental health concerns. Some prescriptions can be very expensive. Keep in mind that there are ways to save money on your prescriptions.

Did you know that many pharmacies offer low-cost generic prescriptions? Examples of pharmacies with a list or program of low-cost generics include Walmart, Walgreens, Target, and many grocery stores. The cost for many medications, including those for mental health, is between \$4 to \$10. You do not need health insurance to receive these prices. Your pharmacy will be able to tell you if they have a low-cost generic list or program, and if your prescription is included on the list.

Additionally, many pharmacies are offering free delivery services during COVID-19. Call your pharmacy directly to see if they are offering free delivery. Visit this website to see a list of participating pharmacies: <https://www.aarp.org/health/drugs-supplements/info-2020/pharmacies-waive-delivery-fees.html>.



### Closing thoughts

We are so grateful to have you as part of our HANDLS community. HANDLS Staff wish each of you a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season. We look forward to staying in touch with you in the New Year!

*HANDLS  
National Institute on Aging  
Biomedical Research Center  
251 Bayview Blvd  
Baltimore MD 21224-2816*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

## **Newsletter for the HANDLS community**

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

**For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.**